

VZCZCXRO3158
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHYE #1286/01 2571254
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141254Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3940
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001286

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC, NEA/NGA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2011

TAGS: PREL AM IR

SUBJECT: IRANIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER LURES HIS ARMENIAN
COUNTERPART OFF THE RESERVATION

Classified By: CDA A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Speaking alongside the visiting Iranian Mejlis Speaker, Armenian Parliament Speaker Torosian made remarks suggesting troubling new dimensions to the Armenian-Iran relationship, and implicitly supporting Iran's position in the current debate over Iran's nuclear program. We think Torosian, the relatively inexperienced, caretaker parliament speaker, probably wandered beyond his government's position. Emboffs communicated concerns to the MFA and National Assembly. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) MEDIA QUOTES GRAB ATTENTION: The Iranian Mejlis Speaker, Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, visited Yerevan on a two-day visit September 11-12. The most eye-catching headlines emerged from Adel's joint press conference with Armenian Parliament Speaker Tigran Torosian. According to press reports, Haddad-Adel said the two had spoken of a possible second Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline, perhaps capable of exporting Iranian gas on to Georgia and on to Europe. Torosian commented that the two countries had agreed to assist each other by representing one another's views in various international fora in which one and not the other might participate. Torosian also commented that "no country or group of countries must use their powers at one or another point to restrict other countries' rights." Torosian went on to call for peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue through negotiations and in accordance with international treaties.

¶3. (C) FOOT-SHUFFLING FROM PARLIAMENT OFFICIAL: Polchief met Vahruhan Nercissiants, the chief foreign policy adviser of the National Assembly (a career diplomat seconded to the parliament staff), to inquire about the Iranian visit and seek clarification of Torosian's comments. Nercissiants downplayed the significance of the overall visit and of the specific comments. He characterized the visit as purely a matter of routine courtesies that did not signal any shifts in Armenian policy. He observed that Armenia has an important interest in maintaining relations with Iran, as the latter is a very important trade route to the Persian Gulf and energy supplier for land-locked Armenia.

¶4. (C) NUCLEAR PROBLEM: Nercissiants, who said he had been in the meeting, claimed that Torosian's message to Iran had been clear that, although Iran had a right to pursue peaceful nuclear energy, Iran must observe both the letter and spirit of applicable international law. He said Haddad-Abel complained that the "superpowers" were unfairly pressuring Iran. Polchief commented that the press spin clearly suggested that Torosian was taking Iran's side against the international community's effort to bring Iran into compliance with its obligations. Nercissiants insisted this was not the correct interpretation, and understood why we

would object to this kind of posture from Armenia.

¶15. (C) INTERNATIONAL FORA/GAS PIPELINE: Nercissiants said that the proposal to represent each other's interests in international organizations had little substance to it, but arose mainly out of an Armenian request to Iran to counteract any Azerbaijani propaganda regarding N-K and related issues in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and other such fora to which Armenia would not be invited. There was no equivalent specific request from the Iranian side.

Polchief suggested that Torosian's remarks created the appearance that Armenia sided with Iran and against the U.S. and the international community at the height of the current dispute before the U.N. Security Council. To imply that each country might speak for the other in international organizations suggested an even closer level of mutual friendship, and was unfortunately timed. Polchief suggested Armenia might wish to think carefully before casting itself in such a light. Polchief also noted that a gas pipeline that exported Iranian gas through Armenia to Georgia and other countries could be a serious concern under U.S. sanctions law. Nercissiants promised to relay all our concerns to the speaker. He said that any second gas pipeline was very speculative at the moment, and years away.

¶16. (C) MFA CAUGHT OFFGUARD: Econoff used a previously scheduled meeting with Deputy FM Arman Kirakossian also to inquire about Torosian's remarks with the Iranian speaker. Like Nercissiants, Kirakossian also described the Mejlis Speaker's stop as purely a courtesy visit. He was quite surprised by the point on international organizations, saying he had been in the meeting between Torosian and Haddad-Adel, and had heard no such discussion. On the pipeline, Kirakossian said this was a new proposal, floated for the first time from the Iranian side. Econoff reiterated our

YEREVAN 00001286 002 OF 002

Iran-Libya Sanctions Act concerns. Kirakossian only replied obliquely that it was a "delicate time" all around.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Our feeling is that Torosian--trying to play the statesman and unaccustomed to the role--said more than he should have to please his Iranian guest. We guess that little or nothing will come of these initiatives, and that the Iranian Mejlis Speaker's visit will in the end amount to little more than diplomatic pleasantries. Still, it is an unfortunate time for the Armenian speaker to be freelancing on Iran policy or seem to cozy up to the southern neighbors. We can hope that Torosian will over time mature into the job, and learn not to over-reach his foreign policy brief in such situations.

GODFREY